

Suburban Delegates Divided Mostly Along Partisan Lines

By Eric Krol

Chicago Daily Herald

January 11, 2007

WASHINGTON-U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin of Springfield pilloried President Bush's plan to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq as moving America in "the wrong direction."

"Escalation of this war is not the change the American people called for in the last election," said Durbin, delivering the national Democratic response on Wednesday night. "They (the Iraqis) must know that every time they call 911, we are not going to send 20,000 more American soldiers."

Illinois' two Democratic senators and two suburban Democratic House members didn't like Bush's decision to send more troops. The president found support among several suburban Republicans, however.

"The current strategy is not working, but failure in Iraq will haunt Americans for years to come," said freshman Republican Rep. Peter Roskam of Wheaton. "The next operation will only succeed if it is robust enough to secure Baghdad."

Republican U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert of Hinsdale said "we owe it to our troops to give the Iraqis one last chance" to take control of their country.

But Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park broke with Bush and said he advised "against the proposed troop surge."

"The best way forward for the United States in the Middle East is to assemble a diplomatic surge that far exceeds any troop surge," Kirk said.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Chicago, long a war foe, argued Bush is only plunging America "ever deeper into the quagmire" in Iraq.

"The president offered no evidence that more troops would force the warring factions toward the necessary political settlement, and attached no consequences should the Iraqis fail to make progress," said Obama, who spoke on ABC's "Nightline" late Wednesday and will appear on the "Today" show on NBC at about 6:10 a.m. this morning.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Evanston offered probably the harshest criticism of Bush, saying Americans "heard a giant sucking sound" pulling U.S. troops further into an Iraqi civil war. "The President is dealing with an Iraq that only exists in his imagination," she said.

And Democratic U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean of Barrington, who was briefed at the White House before Bush's speech, said she has "concerns about that strategy from what I heard," including additional troops.

Republican Rep. Don Manzullo, whose district includes much of McHenry County, said he's "concerned" about Bush's decision to send more troops but ultimately continues to support the president on the war.

"The President was correct to call on Iraqi leaders to take much more responsibility for defending their citizens," Manzullo said in a statement. "If the Iraqi government truly wants peace, it must get more serious about training its soldiers and cracking down on the sectarian violence that has erupted in and around Baghdad. We can't help Iraq if Iraq won't help itself."

A spokesman in former House speaker Dennis Hastert's district office said he would offer no comment.